

SIR WILLIAM. Capital. [*Passing on towards the drawing-room*] Your father coming up to-night?

FREDA. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. Be good enough to tell him I specially want to see him here after dinner, will you?

FREDA. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. By the way, just ask him to bring the game-book in, if he's got it.

He goes out into the drawing-room; and FREDA stands restlessly tapping her foot against the bottom stair. With a flutter of skirts CHRISTINE KEITH comes rapidly down. She is a nice-looking, fresh-coloured young woman in a low-necked dress.

CHRISTINE. Hullo, Freda! How are you?

FREDA. Quite well, thank you, Miss Christine—Mrs. Keith, I mean. My lady told me to give you these.

CHRISTINE. [*Taking the roses*] Oh! Thanks! How sweet of mother!

FREDA. [*In a quick, toneless voice*] The others are for Miss Lanfarne. My lady thought white would suit her better.

CHRISTINE. They suit *you* in that black dress.

[*FREDA lowers the roses quickly.*

What do you think of Joan's engagement?

FREDA. It's very nice for her.

CHRISTINE. I say, Freda, have they been going hard at rehearsals?

PLAYS BY
JOHN GALSWORTHY

THE SILVER BOX
JOY
STRIFE
JUSTICE
THE LITTLE DREAM

THE ELDEST SON
A DOMESTIC DRAMA IN THREE ACTS



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BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1912

PASADENA COMMUNITY
PLAYHOUSE ASSOCIATION

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS



PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIR WILLIAM CHESHIRE, *a baronet*
LADY CHESHIRE, *his wife*
BILL, *their eldest son*
HAROLD, *their second son*
RONALD KEITH (*in the Lancers*), *their son-in-law*
CHRISTINE (*his wife*), *their eldest daughter*
DOT, *their second daughter*
JOAN, *their third daughter*
MABEL LANFARNE, *their guest*
THE REVEREND JOHN LATTER, *engaged to Joan*
OLD STUDDENHAM, *the head-keeper*
FREDA STUDDENHAM, *the lady's-maid*
YOUNG DUNNING, *the under-keeper*
ROSE TAYLOR, *a village girl*
JACKSON, *the butler*
CHARLES, *a footman*

TIME: The present. The action passes on December 7 and 8 at the Cheshires' country house, in one of the shires.

ACT I. SCENE I. The hall; before dinner.

SCENE II. The hall; after dinner.

ACT II. Lady Cheshire's morning room; after breakfast.

ACT III. The smoking-room; tea-time.
A night elapses between Acts I. and II.

ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is a well-lighted, and large, oak-panelled hall, with an air of being lived in, and a broad, oak staircase. The dining-room, drawing-room, billiard-room, all open into it; and under the staircase a door leads to the servants' quarters. In a huge fireplace a log fire is burning. There are tiger-skins on the floor, horns on the walls; and a writing-table against the wall opposite the fireplace. FREDA STUDDENHAM, a pretty, pale girl with dark eyes, in the black dress of a lady's-maid, is standing at the foot of the staircase with a bunch of white roses in one hand, and a bunch of yellow roses in the other. A door closes above, and SIR WILLIAM CHESHIRE, in evening dress, comes downstairs. He is perhaps fifty-eight, of strong build, rather bull-necked, with grey eyes, and a well-coloured face, whose choleric autocracy is veiled by a thin urbanity. He speaks before he reaches the bottom.

SIR WILLIAM. Well, Freda! Nice roses. Who are they for?

FREDA. My lady told me to give the yellow to Mrs. Keith, Sir William, and the white to Miss Lanfarne, for their first evening.